

## USE OF THE GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CHARGE CARD

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To provide procedures for use of the government contractor-issued travel charge card for procurement of transportation services, subsistence, and other allowable travel and transportation expenses incurred during official travel.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENT/MAJOR CHANGES:** The government contractor-issued travel charge card shall be used by VA employees in accordance with the procedures in this handbook. VA Administrations and staff offices are authorized to develop operational procedures to supplement this handbook.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Travel Policy Division (047GC3), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook. Comments, questions, or suggestions may be addressed to that office at 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 0631.1, Travel Charge Card Policy.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** MP-1, part II, chapter 2, appendix M.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY  
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

/s/  
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Acting Assistant Secretary  
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## USE OF THE GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CHARGE CARD

**1. PURPOSE.** This handbook provides procedures in accordance with the General Services Administration (GSA) regulations implementing the Travel and Transportation Reform Act of 1998, P.L. 105-264 (October 19, 1998), 5 U.S.C. 5701. It applies to civilian employees and is effective for travel performed after February 29, 2000.

**2. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION.** All VA employees who travel frequently (two or more times annually) must apply for and use the government contractor-issued charge card for all official travel expenses, unless an exemption applies (see paragraph 14 regarding exemptions). When employees are not on official travel, the card will not be used. Personal use of the card is prohibited. Abuse of the card will result in disciplinary action by VA. Disciplinary actions may range from a reprimand to removal.

**3. TRAVEL CARD APPLICATION AND MAINTENANCE PROCESS.** Upon determination by their supervisors that an employee is eligible to be issued a travel charge card, the following procedures must be used to obtain a government contractor-issued charge card and personal identification number (PIN), and for the maintenance of the card:

a. Employees must obtain a government travel card (individually billed account) set-up form from their agency/organization program coordinator (A/OPC).

b. Employees must complete the "Employee Information" and "Applicant Signature" sections of the form.

c. The completed form must be approved by their supervisor and forwarded with additional form(s), if any, to the respective A/OPC.

d. The respective A/OPC will ensure the completeness of the employee information on the government travel card (individually billed account) set-up form.

e. The respective A/OPC will ensure that the appropriate supervisor signs the government travel card (individually billed account) set-up form and will forward the original copy of the form to the contractor for processing.

f. The contractor will issue a travel charge card in the name of the employee upon request of the A/OPC.

g. The contractor will mail the charge card and personal identification number (PIN) to the participating employee's home address upon receipt of the completed application.

h. The employee will contact the contractor and A/OPC within 30 days after a change of name, address, or office location, or when any other significant change occurs.

i. The employee will return their government contractor-issued travel charge card for cancellation when the employee no longer travels, or upon retirement, resignation or transfer to another Federal agency.

**4. AUTHORIZED CHARGE CARD USAGE.** Employees who are issued a government contractor-issued travel charge card are responsible for ensuring that the card is used for authorized official travel expenses only.

a. Using the contractor-issued card for personal purposes or allowing others, including family members, to use the card is prohibited.

b. Possession and use of the contractor-issued charge card does not exempt employees from utilizing government city-pair contract carriers, American-Flag carriers, or Travel Management Centers (TMCs).

c. Cardholders must use prudent travel practices and observe the rules and regulations governing official travel.

d. Employees may not use the charge card to make personal purchases or ATM withdrawals unrelated to official travel.

e. The Travel and Transportation Reform Act of 1998, Public Law 105-264, dated October 19, 1998, mandates the use of the government contractor-issued charge card for payment of all expenses relating to official authorized government travel.

f. The following procedures must be used when purchasing tickets for official travel and for all other official travel-related expenses:

(1) Employees are required to use the government contractor-issued charge card when purchasing their own common carrier transportation. Federal Travel Regulations prohibit employees from using personal charge cards for purchasing common carrier transportation. Failure to use the government contractor-issued charge card for official travel expenses as required in the Federal Travel Regulations may subject the employee to disciplinary action.

(2) Contractor-issued charge cards will be used for travel advances, lodging, meals, car rentals, and miscellaneous subsistence expenses related to official travel. Travel advances with the contractor-issued charge card are limited to the amount allowed for meals per travel day, depending on temporary duty location, plus amounts for anticipated taxicabs (if applicable), mileage, tolls, and laundry (if applicable).

(3) The contractor-issued charge card is not to be used for the purchase of personal items.

(4) Travelers should make every attempt to find a place of accommodation (hotel or motel) that accepts the contractor-issued charge card and complies with the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act. In those instances where the traveler discovers that the place of accommodation does not accept the contractor-issued charge card, an ATM withdrawal to cover lodging expenses is authorized.

**5. IMPACT OF REFUSAL TO APPLY FOR AND USE THE GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR-ISSUED CHARGE CARD ON CASH ADVANCES.** As a matter of law (P.L. 105-264, section 2; 41 CFR 301-51.1 and 301-51.3), employees must use the government contractor-issued charge card for official travel expenses unless exempted from the charge card requirement under GSA regulations, or by the Secretary, or by a designee of the Secretary.

a. Unless provided an exemption as outlined in this handbook, an employee's refusal to apply for a government contractor-issued charge card is considered insubordination, which may be the basis for disciplinary action.

b. Employees who refuse to apply for the charge card and who are not covered by an exemption, or have their card suspended or canceled due to non-payment of their bill, or use the charge card for purposes other than those associated with official travel shall not be authorized for a cash advance for travel purposes.

**6. LOST OR STOLEN CHARGE CARDS.** An employee is not responsible for any charges incurred against a lost or stolen card provided the employee promptly reports the loss to the contractor under the terms of the card member agreement. Employees may call the contractor 24 hours a day for this purpose.

## **7. CHARGE CARD SUSPENSION AND CANCELLATION.**

a. The contractor-issued charge card will be suspended when an outstanding balance becomes 60 days past due. The contractor-issued charge card may be unilaterally suspended without prior consultation. In all cases, outstanding balances must be paid in full. Partial payments are not permitted.

b. When an outstanding balance becomes 120 days past due, charge card privileges will be cancelled and an interest penalty will be assessed by the contractor on the overdue amount. Employees will not be reimbursed for the interest penalty. When an account is 131 days late, employee nonpayment information may be reported to the credit bureau.

c. Supervisory officials are to ensure that employees affected by suspension and cancellation obtain transportation using the centrally billed account (CBA) to obtain and pay for common carrier transportation only.

**8. OBTAINING PASSENGER TRANSPORTION SERVICES.** All common carrier transportation tickets will be purchased from an agency-approved Travel Management Center (TMC). When obtaining transportation services, the traveler must complete a VA Form 3036, travel authority (TA), for all official travel and provide the TA number to the TMC when reservations are made and charged to the contractor-issued charge card. [Note: consult the unit A/OPC for charges to the CBA.]

**9. UNUSED OR PARTIALLY USED TICKETS.** Employees must use the following procedures to obtain credit for unused or partially used tickets:

a. Submit unused or partially used tickets and passenger coupons to the TMC to obtain a charge card refund notice. Retain the refund notice and unused ticket receipt until the appropriate credit is issued on a subsequent charge card statement. Do not submit unused tickets with the travel voucher.

b. Submit a copy of the charge card refund notice issued by the TMC along with a copy of the passenger coupon with a completed travel voucher to obtain reimbursement from VA for the portion of the ticket used. Travelers may not submit a voucher for unused transportation tickets.

c. Use the following procedures for charges on the contractor-issued statement that should be reflected as credits:

(1) Submit a dispute form to the contractor. Forms may be obtained from the A/OPC or via [www.va.gov/ofinop/valocity](http://www.va.gov/ofinop/valocity), under the Travel icon;

(2) Subtract the amount of the credit from the balance payable on the statement;

(3) Make the payment only for the adjusted amount;

(4) Send via fax (904-954-7700) the completed dispute form along with a copy of the refund credit receipt to the contractor; and

(5) Allow 6-8 weeks from the date of the refund credit receipt for the contractor-issued charge card statement to reflect the credit.

**10. LOST TICKETS.** The following procedures are used in obtaining a replacement for a lost ticket:

a. Explain the ticket loss to the ticket agent and request an alternate ticket. Most carriers attempt to reissue a ticket in accordance with airline procedures. Most carriers comply if boarding passes have not already been issued against the lost ticket, and if the employee can produce proper identification and a copy of their travel orders. However, if an alternate ticket cannot be provided, the employee must purchase a new ticket and immediately file a Lost Ticket Application with the respective airline.

b. Submit a copy of the Lost Ticket Application and a letter of explanation to the address given by the contractor to obtain a credit on the contractor-issued charge card statement.

c. Submit an additional copy of the Lost Ticket Application - and charge slip if the lost original ticket was partially used - along with the travel voucher (SF 1012). Employees are personally responsible for Lost Ticket Application service charges. Employees may also be liable for any expenditure by the Government caused through negligence in safeguarding tickets issued in their name.

**11. TRAVEL ADVANCES.** Authorized travel advances shall be obtained through an ATM using the contractor-issued charge card. VA has established the maximum amount that may be withdrawn in 1 week at \$400. A/POCs may decrease the

maximum amount allowed for travel advances on any individual travel card, but may not increase the advance amount in excess of \$400. The \$400 limit may only be increased on a case-by-case basis by the Office of Financial Operations (047F).

**12. ATM SERVICES.** Employees using the charge card to obtain cash advances from an ATM must adhere to the following rules without exception. Violations of these procedures are violations of Office of Personnel Management regulations pertaining to the conduct of employees (5 CFR section 735.203) and may result in disciplinary action.

a. ATM withdrawals are limited to the amounts stated in the ATM card member agreement and the employee's travel authorization, which may not exceed \$400 per week (see paragraph 11). The employee shall be reimbursed by the Agency for all authorized and allowable travel expenses. However, charges in excess of authorized and allowable official travel expenses are the financial responsibility of the employee and are not reimbursable. Unauthorized use of the card can result in disciplinary action.

b. ATM advances are obtained solely for authorized government travel. An employee may not withdraw any amount unless authorized to do so. When authorized, the charge card may be used to obtain cash travel advances at ATMs worldwide. The charge card contractor will bill the employee the amount of the withdrawal, the applicable transaction charge, and any bank surcharges. Withdrawals may not exceed the advance limitations stated on the employee's travel authorization, which should not exceed the allowable per diem amount. Abuse of ATM privileges will result in disciplinary action.

c. With regard to ATM transactions and cash purchases, the SF 1012 (travel voucher) should reflect a claim for per diem and other authorized miscellaneous expenses paid for in cash. The amount of the ATM withdrawal is not claimed on the employee's travel voucher; however, applicable transaction charges and bank surcharges should be claimed on the voucher and will be reimbursed. Claims for ATM fees are disallowed in cases where:

(1) Withdrawals are in excess of the amount authorized on the travel authorization, except cases of denomination rounding; or

(2) Withdrawals are made after the last day of travel.

If an ATM advance is obtained and the trip is cancelled thereafter, the employee shall send a check for the amount of the advance to the contractor upon receipt of the bill.

d. An employee's ATM privileges will be suspended if an outstanding balance becomes 60 days past due. An employee's ATM privileges will be cancelled if an outstanding balance becomes 120 days past due. The contractor may suspend or cancel an employee's ATM privileges if the contractor reasonably believes that the employee has made an unauthorized withdrawal. The contractor may unilaterally suspend or cancel an employee's card without prior consultation. General ethical principles applicable to Executive Branch employees require that they satisfy all just financial obligations (5 CFR 2635.101(b)(12)).

### 13. TRAVEL VOUCHER CLAIMS

a. Employees are reimbursed for authorized and allowable official travel and transportation expenses, supported by receipts, in accordance with applicable travel policies and procedures. The use of the contractor-issued charge card does not change the procedures for completing and submitting a claim for reimbursement of travel expenses.

b. Upon completion of authorized travel, employees are required to:

(1) prepare and submit an SF 1012, Travel Voucher, or an approved electronic format, in the usual manner;

(2) submit claims for travel reimbursement to the approving official within 5 workdays after completion of a trip. Employees who are unable to file a voucher within 5 days due to emergency situations must contact their supervisors for direction and assistance and are reminded that regardless of whether reimbursement of travel expenses is made, payment of their government contractor-issued charge card bill must be made in accordance with the charge card agreement;

c. When on extended travel (more than 30 days), employees are required to submit biweekly travel vouchers to keep the charge card account current with the contractor-issued charge card statement (employees on extended travel must continue to make their government contractor-issued charge card payment as required in the charge card agreement);

d. Approving officials will approve the voucher within 3 workdays of receipt and submit it to the servicing fiscal office or return it to the traveler for revision. Travel reimbursements will be made consistent with collective bargaining agreements.

### 14. EXEMPTED TRAVEL EXPENSES AND/OR CLASSES OF EMPLOYEES

a. The government contractor-issued charge card must be used for all official travel expenses, unless an exemption applies. Employees may only use the card for expenses incurred in connection with official travel. Employees who use the card for other purposes are subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

b. The government has exempted the following official travel expenses and/or classes of employees from the mandatory use of the government contractor-issued charge card:

(1) Expenses incurred at a vendor that does not accept the government contractor-issued charge card.

(2) Laundry/dry cleaning.

(3) Parking.



(4) Local transportation system.

(5) Taxi.

(6) Tips.

(7) Meals when use of the card is impractical (e.g., group meals or when the government contractor-issued charge card is not accepted).

(8) Phone calls (when a government telephone or government calling card is available for use in accordance with Departmental policy).

(9) An employee who has an application pending for the charge card.

(10) Expenses incurred by non-VA personnel traveling at VA's request to perform official business, and which is funded by VA appropriations (travel at the invitation of VA).

(11) New appointees traveling prior to reporting to duty.

(12) Relocation allowances, except for en-route travel and house hunting trip expenses.

(13) Employees who travel infrequently (less than twice a year).

**15. AUTHORITY TO GRANT EXEMPTIONS FROM USE OF THE CARD.** Only the Secretary may grant exemptions, other than those listed in paragraph 14, from the mandatory use of the contractor-issued travel charge card (41 CFR 301-70.701). Any exemptions granted by the Secretary must be reported in writing to the Administrator of General Services, 1800 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20405, within 30 days after granting the exemption, stating the reasons for the exemption. A copy of this notification must be forwarded to the Office of Finance (047).

**16. GRANTING EXEMPTION FOR AN INDIVIDUAL PERSON OR SPECIFIC TRAVEL EXPENSE.** Individual exemptions will be granted only under exceptional or unusual circumstances and when it is determined to be necessary and in the interest of VA. Requests for exemptions must be made in writing to the Secretary through the Office of Management (004), and must include the following information:

a. The individual or specific travel expense for which the exemption is being requested;

b. Duration of the exemption;

c. Justification for the exemption;

d. Name, title, and signature of the official requesting the exemption; and

e. A letter from the applicable Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary endorsing the request for the exemption.

**17. AGENCY REVIEW OF TRAVEL CHARGE CARD USE.** VA, through the A/OPCs, will regularly review contractor-issued reports to monitor the use of the government contractor-issued travel charge card.

a. A/OPCs will review activity and delinquency reports and will provide, upon request, copies of such reports to supervisors and facility fiscal officers.

b. A/OPCs will notify the employee's supervisor of suspected misuse of the card.

c. Supervisors will review activity and delinquency reports provided by the A/OPC.

d. Supervisors will counsel employees on instances of misuse/abuse of the travel charge card.

e. Supervisors will initiate appropriate disciplinary actions for delinquency and unauthorized use of the travel charge card.

f. Supervisors and/or A/OPCs will refer all suspicious or fraudulent charge card activity to the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

g. The OIG will investigate or audit those suspected or accused of abusing or fraudulently using the government contractor-issued travel charge card. The results of the OIG investigations or reviews may be referred for criminal, civil, or administrative action as appropriate.

**18. UNAUTHORIZED USE, MISUSE, AND DELINQUENCY OF CHARGE CARD ACCOUNTS.**

a. Misuse of the contractor-issued charge card and account delinquency are considered misconduct and subject the cardholder to disciplinary actions ranging from a reprimand to removal. Charge card privileges may also be cancelled. The contractor provides reports that monitor usage and indicate any potential abuses to A/OPCs. The A/OPC will inform the appropriate official of any misuse of the charge card in their respective organizations.

b. VA Handbook 5021, Employee/Management Relations, part I, appendix A, paragraph 2 (21), provides the range of penalties for "Indebtedness—lack of good faith in paying financial obligations, such as failure without good cause to make or live up to arrangements to pay a debt that the employee admits he owes or that is supported by court judgment, or that represents a tax or other financial obligation to the U.S. Government or to State or local government." The range of penalties for this offense is:

(1) For the first offense, an admonishment.

(2) For the second offense, a minimum of admonishment to a maximum of reprimand.

(3) For the third offense, a minimum of admonishment to a maximum of removal.

**19. BILLING INFORMATION.** The terms of the contract with the charge card contractor require billing and payment to be performed in the following manner. The contractor bills charges directly to the individual employee each month. These charges must be paid in full by the billing due date. Partial payment is not permitted. Interest will be charged on outstanding balances that become 120 days overdue. Employees will not be reimbursed for the interest penalty. Employees who are on travel for extended periods of time are still responsible for making timely charge card payments. These employees must make appropriate arrangements to have their bills paid on time.

**20. BILLING DISPUTES.** Travelers should review their billing statement immediately upon receipt to ensure all charges are appropriate. Should there be a questionable charge on the billing statement, the traveler must immediately file a Government Cardholder Dispute Form with the contractor. The A/OPC will provide this form to the cardholder, or it can be obtained on the Web site, [www.va.gov/ofinop/valociti](http://www.va.gov/ofinop/valociti). A properly disputed portion of a bill, one that has been submitted to the contractor as required, does not have to be paid until the dispute is resolved. Only the undisputed portion of a bill must be paid by the due date.

**21. CONTRACTOR LIMITATIONS.** The contractor may not do the following:

- a. Establish expenditure limits not authorized by VA's program administrator;
- b. Conduct credit checks on employees designated to receive government cards, except for reinstatement of an employee's card privileges;
- c. Release credit information to other than authorized employing Agency officials or the individual cardholder;
- d. Sell or otherwise provide employee names or addresses to other commercial interests;
- e. Charge membership fees;
- f. Include commercial advertisements or other forms of solicitation with monthly billing statements; and
- g. Hold employees or their offices liable for any charges made with lost or stolen cards, provided the employee notifies the contractor promptly upon discovering that his/her charge card has been lost or stolen.

**22. COLLECTION OF UNDISPUTED DELINQUENT AMOUNTS OWED TO THE CONTRACTOR.** The Travel and Transportation Reform Act of 1998, Public Law 105 – 264 (October 19, 1998), authorizes agencies, at the request of the contractor, to make deductions from an employee's disposable pay to recover funds owed to the contractor as a result of delinquencies by the employee on a travel charge card. Agencies may

only collect undisputed delinquent amounts for which the employee has been reimbursed under applicable travel regulations. GSA published regulations (41 CFR part 301-51 et seq.) on January 19, 2000, and April 21, 2000, which implement Public Law 105-264.

a. Upon the written request from a government travel charge card contractor, stations will collect undisputed delinquent amounts owed to the contractor from a delinquent employee's disposable pay (as defined in paragraph 22b.). VA must promptly forward all amounts collected by payroll deductions to the contractor. VA may only collect undisputed delinquent amounts for which VA has reimbursed the employee under the applicable travel regulations and in accordance with a proper travel claim. There is no authority for VA to recover amounts that the employee owes the card contractor through misuse of the card.

b. (1) Disposable pay is defined in 41 CFR §301-54.2 and §301-76.2 as that part of the employee's compensation remaining after the deduction of any amounts required by law to be withheld. These deductions do not include discretionary deductions, such as savings bonds, charitable deductions, etc. Deductions may be made from any type of pay, e.g., basic pay, special pay, or incentive pay.

(2) In accordance with the Government Card Services Travel Program Cardholder Account Agreement, an account is considered delinquent if payment for the undisputed principal amount has not been received by the travel charge card contractor 45 calendar days from the closing date on the billing statement in which the charge appeared.

c. Prior to the deductions from the employee's disposable pay, VA shall notify the employee in writing of the following:

(1) The type and amount of the claim, the intention to collect the claim by deduction from his/her pay within 45 days, and the explanation of his/her rights as a debtor, including notice that VA cannot initiate offset of pay if the employee disputes the delinquent amount with either VA or the travel charge card contractor.

(2) The employee has the opportunity to inspect and copy VA records related to the claim;

(3) The employee's right to a review (within the Department) of VA's determination of travel reimbursement still due the card contractor, and the decision to collect the amount; and,

(4) The employee has the opportunity to make a written agreement with the contractor to repay the delinquent amount.

d. VA's review when requested under paragraph 22.c.(3) is limited solely to a review by the station fiscal office of the validity and amount of that portion of the delinquent amount pertaining to VA's reimbursement to the employee under the applicable travel regulations and in accordance with a proper travel claim. Once this review is completed, the station fiscal office will provide the employee with a written verification or

clarification of the validity and amount of VA's travel reimbursement. There shall be no oral or telephone hearings in conjunction with this review.

e. If the employee files a dispute with either VA or the charge card contractor or files a request for review within the Department (see paragraph 22.c.(3)), VA is prohibited from collecting any amounts owed to the contractor from the delinquent employee's disposable pay. As long as the employee continues to dispute the delinquent amount, VA is prohibited from collecting any amounts owed the contractor, even if VA has provided the employee with the review required by paragraph 22.c.(3).

f. If the employee has not submitted a proper travel claim within the timeframe requirement of 41 CFR §301-52.7, and there are no extenuating circumstances, VA may collect the undisputed delinquent amounts.

g. (1) If the employee, in accordance with paragraph 22.c.(4), has not entered into a written agreement with the contractor to repay the delinquent amount, and if the employee has not otherwise disputed the claim (see paragraph 21.e), then VA may deduct as much as 15 percent per pay period from the employee's disposable pay, unless the employee consents in writing for VA to deduct a greater amount.

(2) The employee may also request in writing that an amount less than 15 percent per pay period be deducted based on the employee's ability to pay. Prior to reaching any agreement with the employee on the deduction of a lesser amount, the employee may be asked to submit documentation to verify this request.

h. Facilities should ensure that every effort is made to reimburse employees in a timely manner for all appropriate travel expenses.

i. Labor/management obligations must be met at all local levels prior to implementation of these procedures.

j. Facilities should direct questions concerning these procedures to the Office of Financial Policy, Cash and Debt Management Division (047GC1), at (202) 273-5570.

## **23. PRIVACY ACT NOTICE**

a. The following information is provided to comply with the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended. The information requested on the application form is required under the provisions of 5 U.S. Code chapter 57, as amended, for the purpose of recording travel expenses incurred by the employee and to claim other entitlement and allowances. The information requested on the application form is required to provide government departments and agencies with the following:

(1) Necessary information on the commercial travel and transportation payment and expense control system that will provide travelers charge cards for official travel and related expenses;

(2) Attendant operational and control support; and

(3) Management information reports for expense control purposes.

b. Federal department and agency officers and employees who have a need for such information in the performance of their duties use this information. Information is transferred to appropriate Federal, State, or local agencies when relevant to civil, criminal, or regulatory investigations or prosecutions, or pursuant to a requirement by GSA or other such agency in connection with the hiring or firing, security clearance, or other such investigations of the performance of official duty in government service. The information requested is not mandatory. However, failure to provide the information invalidates the application and prevents the issuance of the contractor-issued charge card.